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ABSTRACT

A wide variety of internal and external communication methods used by the Piqua City School District (Ohio) are described. A philosophy statement is followed by descriptions of the roles of the board of education, the community, the teachers, the superintendent, and the media in an effective communications program. Among the 41 external communication methods which are used to develop positive relationships with the community are personal contact by school administrators, media publicity, volunteer programs, and recognition for assistance to the schools. Seventeen methods of internal communication with school staff are described which emphasize the recognition of staff contributions and the development and maintenance of good administrator-staff relationships. Efforts to make board of education meetings as open to the community as possible and a program to recognize positive student actions are also described. (DC)

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Communication Notebook

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Duane Bachman, Superintendent

PIQUA CITY SCHOOLS

COMMUNICATION NOTEBOOK

A PHILOSOPHY

We firmly believe that an effective communications program must address itself to these ideals:

---it must be personal and continuous
---it must appeal to the "guy on the street" without overlooking the many other "publics" of a school district
---it must promote a "we care" attitude
---it must "listen" to the people
---it must be examined regularly and expanded to meet the needs of the community

Any public relations effort that completely ignores any of these ideals will eventually find its motives challenged by the citizens of the district.

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

A comprehensive communications program must have the complete support of the board of education. Our philosophy dictates that the board be completely informed by the administrative team of the activities, plans, progress and problems of the district. They must also accept that this philosophy will take time and effort on the part of everyone involved with the educational process.

We are fortunate in that our board of education has been more than supportive of our efforts and have been willing to participate with us in our communications program.

THE COMMUNITY

Piqua is a city school district of approximately 23,000 people. The community has long been supportive of education and currently is the site of a comprehensive joint vocational school, hosts the first state assisted general and technical college and offers a variety of educational opportunities for youth and adults.

In November of 1978 the voters of the district approved a $10 million high school by a 68% majority.

That building, lauded as one of the finest high schools in the country, opened in February, 1981.

THE TEACHERS

The ultimate success of any communications program and the district itself is the classroom teacher. By far the most positive public relations "expert" is the person who has the daily contact with the boys and girls. No communications program, regardless of its intent or magnitude, can be effective without quality classroom teachers.

THE SUPERINTENDENT

The chief school administrator, by the nature of his/her position, becomes a visible member of the community. The philosophy and program described in this report calls for the Superintendent to adopt a "total commitment" attitude toward the importance of a good communications program.

Unfortunately, oftentimes the chief school administrator is pictured as a person who neither asks for or needs the opinions of others, cannot and will not associate with the "guy on the street" but only responds to the desires of the influential of the community, and really doesn't "care" about the feelings of the general public.

THE SUPERINTENDENT (CONTINUED)

The communications ideas offered in this booklet represent the philosophy of the Superintendent, supported by the board of education and implemented by the entire staff. These communications activities have been implemented in Piqua, without benefit of a person or staff specifically employed in a public relations capacity.

THE MEDIA

The support of the media is extremely crucial to the success of any communications program. We have developed the posture of being extremely "open" with the media and encourage them to work with the staff in reporting the activities of the district. Our relationship has been extremely pleasant, even though there has been an occasional time when there is a difference of opinion.

The advent of cable t.v. offers educators an unlimited number of opportunities to tell the school story. Cable t.v. is a "sleeping giant" as a school communications tool and we must take full advantage of the opportunities it provides us.

We have been fortunate in dealing with a professional group of people who represent the media in our community. We do everything in our power to cooperate with them.

THOSE INFORMAL TIMES

Some of the most effective times to communicate coincide with the informal activities that are a part of any community. Seeing the chief school administrator fall victim to the "dunk machine" or wet sponges at a community picnic may be a bit degrading but this posture has an appeal and portrays the Superintendent as a "regular" member of the community.

THOSE INFORMAL TIMES (CONTINUED)

Accompanying teachers and students on field trips and being a part of an outdoor education program adds to the image of the position and displays a genuine concern for the students and the staff.

The informal approach includes associating with the staff and community at neighborhood parties, eating breakfast with them at a local restaurant, saying "hi" and waving to persons as you circulate in the city.

In too many instances we are visualized as being "stuffy" and any opportunity to dispel this feeling is an advantage.

As school administrators we would be doing ourselves a service by participating more often in those informal activities of the community.

COMMUNICATIONS IDEAS

EXTERNAL PUBLICS

NEIGHBORHOOD WALK

It is not uncommon for the newly selected Superintendent to be hosted at a gathering to meet some members of the community. To test our new philosophy we decided to "go to the people" instead of asking them to come to us. As the new Superintendent, the respective elementary principals and the PTA officers were asked to accompany the new chief school administrator in the attendance areas in the early evening. This approach enabled us to meet many of the parents of the students, those who send their children to the parochial schools and especially those who did not have children in the schools. The positive response to this effort more than justified the many evenings spent in the various neighborhoods in Piqua.

The concept proved so successful that a neighborhood walk was organized during a recent operating levy campaign in an attendance area where the response to past school issues was very negative. For the first time in the history of the district the residents in that area favored a school issue.

On the occasions we appoint a new principal, that person is encouraged to take a walk in their new attendance area. Although some have had reservations as to the merits of the idea, those that have spent the time getting acquainted have found it extremely worthwhile.

TELL-A-PHONE

Another interesting way of sampling public opinion of the school system and getting acquainted with the parents of the students was our "tell-a-phone" effort.

TELL-A-PHONE (CONTINUED)

A secretary supplied the Superintendent with student enrollment cards from the files. Each day the chief school administrator called one of the homes, introduced himself, and asked if they had any personal concerns about the school system. Most of the persons called were pleasantly surprised to hear from the new Superintendent and appreciated being "asked" about their views.

OPEN OFFICE HOURS

Many citizens with personal concerns about the district have wanted to share their feelings with someone with authority but the bureaucracy discourages them. To combat that feeling the chief school administrator regularly sets aside two hours where anyone can come to the office and air their concerns without an appointment. Thanks to the media, the hours, which are rotated, are published on a weekly basis. The citizens have been very receptive to this opportunity.

CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCILS

The need for informal dialogue between a representative group of citizens and the building principal seemed critical in light of criticism of school policies and programs. Each of the nine building principals is required to form a citizen advisory council, representative of the attendance area. The Council meets four or five times each year, discussing items of interest to the members of the community. This avenue has been very productive and it has helped our citizens better understand the school system.

SWAP DAY

One of the most educational communications avenues used in the Piqua City Schools was the offer to give a

SWAP DAY (CONTINUED)

secondary student the "day off" if Mom, Dad or an adult friend came to school and followed the student's schedule. No other activity can offer a parent more insight into the day-by-day operation of a school system than by sharing time with teachers during a normal day. Swap Day (Switch With A Parent) has been so successful that we have made it an annual activity.

REVIEW OF SERVICES

It seems important that inquiries from citizens about staff members and school programs need to be handled formally if an informal approach is not sufficient.

We have adopted a "review of services" procedure and form to adjudicate such concerns. This procedure requires that the complaintant complete the appropriate form noting the problem, which school personnel were contacted and a recommended solution to resolve the matter.

A copy of that form is shared with the building principal/supervisor, one copy goes to the staff member in question and the final copy is forwarded to the Superintendent. This provides a citizen with the opportunity to fully expound to a concern and offer a solution. At the same time it clarifies the issue because it is reduced to writing which eliminates the possibility of the story "changing" during the course of the procedure. It offers our staff information about a concern and gives them an opportunity to prepare a response.

The process is geared to review services of an individual or a school program and applies to certified and classified staff members. Any person who completes the form is guaranteed a written reply after the situation has been reviewed.

MENU-GRAM

There is little question that our most widely read publication is the menu. Parents and students read the menu religiously and we wanted to take advantage of this captive audience and so we use the reverse side of the menu as a newsletter. We have said "thank you" to people, announced special activities, answered questions and offered advice to parents through the menu-gram and its reception has been overwhelming.

VOLUNTEERS IN PIQUA SCHOOLS (VIPS)

One of our most successful programs in the district has been the formation and organization of a VIPS group. Involving our citizens in their schools has been a priority, and we are fortunate in being able to take advantage of the time and talents of these volunteers to offer services to students and teachers. Although we had some reservations about the use of volunteers, both student and adult, these have been allied with the excellent response from everyone concerned with the effort. Involving the citizens has been an excellent public relations device for the system.

ADOPT-A-SCHOOL

Involving the age group between parents of school age children and senior citizens seemed important to us and the "Adopt-A-School" concept was designed to fill that void.

A letter of explanation was sent to business, industry, and community organizations, asking for consideration of becoming "adopted". Two service clubs adopted elementary schools and the McDonald's restaurant adopted several others. The local Red Cross chapter adopted our two junior high schools.

ADOPT-A-SCHOOL (CONTINUED)

We have had some interesting activities in this unique relationship and hope to expand on them in the future.

PARENT EDUCATION

Very few student problems encountered at school are completely isolated from some type of problem at home. Parents seem to keep telling us that they would be responsive to some effort on our part to advise them in "raising" today's youth. We have tried to respond to this very important need by offering parent discussion groups at our elementary schools. We have piloted this avenue by meeting with a group of parents who have willingly volunteered to attend six two-hour sessions and discuss various aspects of the parent-child relationship. The staff of the school district has been used as resource persons for this informal activity. The evaluation of our first effort was extremely favorable and because of the response we hope to expand our program to other elementary schools. It is not easy being a parent and we feel we owe them some assistance.

THANKS

In spite of the times when you wonder if anyone appreciates your efforts, we never lose sight of the fact that many school supporters are helping us in offering a comprehensive educational program to the students we serve. We firmly believe in saying "thanks" to these persons and have developed several types of thank you notes for this purpose.

At the conclusion of the academic year, we send a special "thank you" to our staff, media, volunteers, adult organization officers, other educational institutions and a host of other individuals or groups who have contributed to our success.

SICK CALL PROGRAM

Our "we care" concept is especially effective when someone has been ill, injured or suffering from the aftermath of a tragedy of the death of a loved one. We make an effort to send a special "get well" card if a student or staff member is ill or injured. Visiting those persons hospitalized has also been appreciated because it does show that we will go out of our way to express our concerns.

Unfortunately, there are times when students are called to Heaven. In addition to calling at the funeral home and attending the service, we have developed a special sympathy card that includes a very touching poem that gives solace to the grieving parents.

SPOTLIGHT

Our local newspaper provides us with a column to promote school activities. Since we also have a school page devoted to news of the secondary schools, we use our SPOTLIGHT column to bring our citizens up - to - date on news from the elementary schools in the district.

We also use this column to promote new curricular trends in the district and for items of special interest to the community.

FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOLS AWARD

Every school district is fortunate enough to have individuals, firms and/or organizations that continually enhance the school program with donations, gifts, etc.

To adequately recognize these contributions in our school district we have developed a "Friends of the Schools" award which is presented at the Welcome-Appreciation-Recognition dinner.

HAPPY-GRAMS

Although we are not unique among school districts, this seems to be the year of the "happy-grams". It is encouraging to note that we are recognizing the achievements of the students, whether it be academic or of a citizenship nature, something "large" or something "small" but always important. Each of our buildings has developed a series of "happy-grams" to be used for a variety of reasons, but always designed to be positive in nature. The Superintendent also has a "happy-gram" to be used for the appropriate occasions.

"WE TEACH THE CHILDREN"

Several years ago we developed a videotape on our elementary school curriculum and a slide-tape presentation on our secondary program.

The importance of having such programs and others cannot be misunderstood as the opportunities to share specific aspects of the school operation are numerous, whether it be a part of the services of the Speakers Bureau or used on television.

PRESIDENT'S CLUB

The officers of the adult school organizations oftentimes are looking for a sympathetic ear and an opportunity to share their concerns with someone. It seems logical that the chief school administrator should meet with those persons and respond to their concerns and offer assistance whenever and wherever possible.

We intend to invite the President of each of our school groups to an informal meeting on a quarterly basis to discuss matters of mutual concern.

THOSE SPECIAL WEEKS

Grandparents Week, National School Lunch Week and American Education Week are special to us. We have taken the posture that citizens who take time to visit the schools, the staff and the students will be supportive. We are fortunate in having a group of dedicated staff members planning activities for these "special" weeks.

The response to the invitation to visit the schools has been extremely gratifying and we will continue our efforts to increase the number of visitors.

THOSE SPECIAL DAYS

Staff morale can be improved noticeably when you remember some of the special days that appear on the calendar.

How about a special note to each appropriate staff member on "National High School Coaches Day" or an inspiring message on "Secretaries Day" to those persons who offer such valuable service to the district?

It is also important to remember the day or week that is set aside for the other members of the classified staff. When one of these persons receive a personal note recognizing their contribution to the school district, it will pay dividends to all concerned.

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS

Oftentimes your best friends or worst enemies are those persons who reside within the shadow of the school building. The value of owning a home near the school is often enhanced, but with that location comes some litter, students cutting across the lawn, balls finding their way into the yard from the playground, etc.

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS (CONTINUED)

We encourage our building principals to meet these neighbors on a face-to-face basis and show a genuine concern about these kinds of problems. This approach has been met with enthusiasm and has improved our relationship with our neighbors.

GOLD CARD CLUB

School districts across the country are trying to involve the Senior Citizens in the educational process. We are trying to include them in our volunteer program, have them eat lunch at our schools and we make an extended effort to include them on our committees. Our "Gold Card Club" entitles citizens 60 years of age or older to a free general admission to every school activity. This has been very well received.

The response to Grandparents Week has also been gratifying and hundreds of our "finest" citizens look forward to the many opportunities to get involved with the schools.

One of the more satisfying activities for our Gold Card Club members was a luncheon sponsored by the Student Council at our high school. All of the members of the Gold Card Club were invited to lunch at a modest cost, and given the opportunity to bring a friend.

The luncheon was banquet style, with the students assuming all of the key roles in the activity. Door prizes consisting of flowers from the high school greenhouse were given away and a select group of student musicians entertained our guests in the Center for the Performing Arts.

The response from this special group was phenomenal and they praised all of the school officials for the opportunity to visit the high school, eat with the students and see for themselves what great young men and women we have in our schools. It was such a success that we anticipate making it an annual affair and hope to sponsor a "Gold Card Club Prom" in the spring.

CHRISTMAS CARD

There aren't many ways of saying "thanks" to all the people who support the schools, but we have found that a remembrance at Christmas is appreciated.

We have two kinds of Christmas cards, one that contains an appropriate holiday message and another that resembles a check that expresses a "thank you" for support.

Sending a Christmas card to school supporters is a special way of recognizing the contribution of persons in the community.

PAROCHIAL DIALOGUE

We have a sizable parochial population and enjoy a pleasant working relationship with the non-public school officials. Several times a year we invite the administrators of the non-public schools to a dialogue session where we can share mutual concerns and improve upon our positive relationship.

MC CALENDAR

Most school districts compile an annual activity calendar, but convinced that this approach does not guarantee "readership" we have developed a monthly publication we call our "Mc Calendar". Our local McDonalds restaurant provides us with a monthly calendar format, including a bit of advertising. We include school activities on the calendar and provide copies to the staff and elementary students. We have found this monthly approach to be more practical than the annual calendar.

CAMPAIGN KICK-OFF DINNER

The next time you have to seek voter approval of operating levy or bond issue, begin the formal cam-

CAMPAIGN KICK-OFF DINNER (CONTINUED)

paign with a "dutch treat" dinner, with community leaders and the news media as invited guests. By inviting the leaders of the community, the campaign members and interested citizens you generate a newsworthy activity to get you started.

HATS OFF

We felt a need to do a better job at recognizing the positive deeds of our staff, the students and the citizens that improve the image of the school system.

Our Hats Off program encourages our certified and classified staff members to nominate those persons who make a positive contribution to the school system.

These nomination forms are available in all of the buildings and when completed they are forwarded to the office of the Superintendent. In turn these are published regularly in a special column in the local newspaper. We also send each nominee a special certificate. The staff members have been very enthusiastic about the concept and offer many well-deserved nominees.

We feel it is a special way of saying "thanks".

INFO-PHONE

You may want to consider adding a piece of equipment to your telephone system that will improve your communications efforts. The device allows you to record a short message that can be broadcast to citizens who dial one of the regular school numbers. The tape recording can outline the activities of the day, bring the community up-to-date on emergency announcements, or even offer information on school programs.

Most school districts that have added this system have found it to be especially useful after the close of business hours and before the beginning of the next school day.

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

The Christmas season finds everyone in a festive mood. On an afternoon in December we have an open house in the board of education office featuring a variety of refreshments. Invited guests include our certified and classified staff members, PTA-PTO officers, retired staff members, representatives from area schools, members of business and industry and a host of school supporters. We look forward to this activity each winter and hope our guests enjoy the holiday festivities.

ENVELOPE STUFFERS

A school district forwards many pieces of information via the mails and this would hopefully open up a communications avenue. We have developed envelope stuffers to include in every piece of first class mail that is positive in nature.

We have depicted some of the "good" things our students are doing and make stuffers from these activities. (This also promotes the image of the student body.) The envelope stuffers can promote special weeks in the year, some special activities, educational slogans and any other positive item that can promote the school district.

If you have a series of envelope stuffers, you can alternate them on a monthly basis so that a variety of messages can be used.

STUDENTS SPEAK

The younger kids are so sincere and we wanted to use them in our PR program. We visit an elementary school each week and go into a classroom and ask the youngsters to respond to a pertinent question about their school or about some of their personal activities.

STUDENTS SPEAK (CONTINUED)

We then play the tape before our regular weekly radio program. We feel this approach gives recognition to a building, a particular teacher and a specific group of students, which should provide us with a captive but valuable audience.

Questions could include, "What did you like most about our outdoor education program?", "What were your impressions of our Reading is Fundamental (RIF) project?", "What is your favorite subject in school and why?" There are a host of other questions that could be posed to the students for their very genuine responses.

I HAVE AN IDEA---I HAVE A QUESTION---I HEARD A RUMOR

If you really believe in the value of "listening" to your community, you may like this idea. We have developed a card that asks for ideas, another for rumors and a third for questions about the district. These cards are placed in banks, businesses, the YMCA and YWCA, the library and Chamber of Commerce for people to pick up and send to the office of the Superintendent. The over-sized postcards include the address of the board of education.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARTY LINE

If you feel a need for a representative sounding of the community you may want to organize a "party line" for your use. We ask each building principal to nominate two parents to serve on the party line and about every three months the Superintendent invites them in for coffee and donuts and a dialogue session.

Included in the discussion are items brought to the meeting by the "party line" members as well as concerns from the school personnel. After the meeting, each member of the group is asked to contact three or more other citizens and share with them the

results of the meeting.

HONORARY DIPLOMA

With a "cradle to the grave" communications program you must include something for the younger set. We have developed a miniature of our high school diploma and send this to each newborn.

The effort has been well received and in many instances is our first contact with young parents who do not yet have children in school.

THE BUSINESS PAGE

You are missing a very valuable communications opportunity if you neglect the business page of your local newspaper. Keeping abreast of business and industrial achievements and the promotions of the personnel you can add to your PR image by following-up those items with a personal note to the individual.

SPEAKERS BUREAU

On an annual basis a memorandum is forwarded to each organization and club in our community offering the services of any of our staff to speak to them. During the course of a year we are able to honor these requests and in turn develop a better understanding of the school district.

BAD WEATHER FLYER

One of the most difficult processes to explain to the community is the one used to determine whether or not to cancel classes because of inclement weather. We have developed a special flyer that explains our philosophy, our procedure and suggestions for adapting to this matter. The students are asked to take the

flyer home and share it with their parents. It has been very helpful.

WHAT'S FOR BREAKFAST??

We felt a need to communicate directly but informally with several of our occupational groups. In many instances these groups come in contact with many citizens and they need to be properly informed about the school district or they become counter-productive to your other communication efforts.

We have a breakfast program at several of our elementary schools periodically so we invite ministers, realators and insurance agents to join us and indulge in some informal dialogue about the school district, responding to their questions and sharing some of our concerns. It was extremely successful and we intend to enlarge upon our efforts in the future.

NEWSLETTERS

Any continuous communications program will necessitate a regular flow of newsletters to the public. Our district newsletter is sent on a regular basis to all citizens in the community via our bulk rate mailing permit. At the same time we have developed a plan whereby each of our nine buildings sends to parents a minimum of six newsletters per school year. Nothing is more satisfying to a parent than a newsletter describing the activities of the building.

WELCOME WAGON

Making a positive first impression with parents new to the district is extremely important. Moving to a new community can be a very lonely experience and finding someone who 'cares' about you can leave an excellent first impression.

The schools must do just that. This effort calls for a packet of information and an 'original' welcome letter to be hand delivered to each home that is new to the district. This 'personal' approach adds to the warmth of the welcome.

GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY

We cannot underestimate the importance of a positive relationship with the persons living near the school buildings.

We ask our administrative team and staff members to nominate those 'neighbors' who do something supportive of the building. When nominated the neighbor will receive a document that resembles an insurance policy but contains a 'thank you' for being understanding and supportive. We hope to add complimentary tickets to a school activity in addition to the 'policy'.

These persons need to be applauded for their patience and support.

MILESTONE AWARD

It seems only proper to recognize those senior citizens who are celebrating their Golden Wedding anniversary.

The newspaper usually carries a picture of the couple. That photograph is framed along with an appropriate message of congratulations.

The finished product is hand delivered to the couple reaching that milestone in life.

COMMUNICATION IDEAS

INTERNAL PUBLICS

Ph. D.

We are going to be one of the few school districts to award a Ph. D., but it isn't quite what you would imagine.

There are always individuals or groups who deserve recognition for their contributions to the school district. We are going to award them a Ph. D.

At the regular meeting of the board of education a member of that governing body will be asked to award a Ph. D. degree to someone of their personal choosing. In our case the Ph. D. stands for 'Positive Help and Dedication' to the Piqua City Schools.

The degree will closely resemble one presented by the university and it will be placed in an appropriate diploma folder.

It is another way of recognizing a contribution to the district and is a way for the board of education members to get actively involved in on a regular basis.

JOB ANALYSIS HANDBOOK

We feel we have one of the most unique handbooks dealing with personnel relations in our area. Our job analysis handbook contains the following information for every employee of the school district:

---Job Description
---Evaluation Instruments
---Salary Schedules
---Job Classification Information

JOB ANALYSIS HANDBOOK (CONTINUED)

We use the handbook when we proceed through the employment process. It is especially handy for reference. Each employee is given the appropriate sections of the handbook upon employment.

WHAT'S RIGHT WITH THE PIQUA CITY SCHOOLS

In an attempt to take an "offensive" posture in regard to promoting the many "good" things that are happening in our school district, we have formed a WHAT'S RIGHT WITH THE PIQUA CITY SCHOOLS COMMITTEE, whose sole purpose is to identify specific achievements of the district and share those items with the community in our district newsletter.

In each issue our committee isolates one "positive" aspect of our school system that needs special emphasis such as standardized test scores, students attending the military academies, teachers attending summer school, etc.

We feel that this type of approach is long overdue in school districts.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR/CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Recognizing an outstanding teacher on an annual basis calls attention to the exceptional quality of the certified staff. It seems equally important to recognize a member of the classified staff on the same basis.

Beginning in 1980 both of these awards are a part of the program for the Welcome-Appreciation-Recognition dinner held in September.

RETIRING/NEW STAFF MEMBERS

We are continually looking for ways to remember the dedication of our retired employees. The board of education, by policy, presents an award to these employees and we have included that in our program for the Welcome-Appreciation-Recognition dinner. All of our retired employees are invited to that activity and they have been extremely responsive to that event. We also are certain that each retiring employee receives a "Gold Card" which is well received as well.

Our new staff members are also important to us. It is crucial that we make every attempt to make them feel welcome and a part of the community. Our new employee handbook has been extremely helpful in this regard and our new teacher orientation is designed to be very informal, which is important. We use the "buddy system" in our school district and as a special attempt to welcome these new persons, they are our invited guests at the September meeting of the board of education, where they are recognized and applauded.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Although many of us have forgotten about counting our birthdays, it is still nice to be remembered on that day. The Superintendent sends a "special" birthday greeting card to each certified and classified employee. The staff has been very grateful for this personal approach.

NEW EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

We can all remember the rigors of beginning a new experience. The myriad of paperwork and requirements can be frightening. We have tried to simplify this process by developing a "new employee handbook". Prior to the school year the publication alerts our staff members to the questions of retirement, sick leave, personal leave, certification needs, previous experience credit, medical coverage, payroll deductions, fringe benefits,

NEW EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK (CONTINUED)

etc. We also offer information on housing and beginning of the year activities as well as copies of the various forms needed by the Treasurer. This has been valuable to our office staff as well as beneficial to the new teachers.

DIALOGUE COMMITTEE

When is a committee not really a committee? This informal avenue is open to all employees. After school once per month the Superintendent extends an invitation to meet and discuss any concern the staff may have about the district. Although skeptics may argue that this approach fosters a "complaint" session, that has not been our experience. Many topics that have been called to our attention certainly needed examination and we have all benefited from the discussions and concerns of the dialogue committee.

TIP SHEET

In any school system there are literally hundreds of "feature stories" taking place in the classrooms, but unfortunately the media is not aware of them.

We have developed a TIP SHEET which is a very simple form that briefly describes a possible story of interest to the media. Staff members complete the TIP SHEETS and forward them to the office of the Superintendent. In turn we forward them to the media.

This gives the reporters many new ideas and as a result allows them more time to develop stories on "positive" activities that are happening in the schools.

The TIP SHEET idea is enthusiastically endorsed by the news media and as a result we have had more

stories given to the schools than in the past.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Asking for input on proposed policy decisions is considered standard but using a verbal approach can be misleading and we want to avoid that peril.

We have a special masthead labeled, IMPACT STATEMENT. Proposed policy matters and other items of intense interest are outlined on this form and each member of the administrative team is asked to respond, in writing, to the proposal, noting the "impact" such a policy would have on their staff members and the building they represent.

The IMPACT STATEMENT provides the Superintendent with written information on the various points of view which can be extremely helpful in pursuing policy matters. We have been quite satisfied with this approach.

SUPERINTENDENT-STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

One of the most enjoyable communication ideas with the student body is the advisory committee. Each elementary and secondary school selects two students to participate on this dialogue committee. The group meets two - four times per year with the agenda basically being the concerns the students have about the school system. Each meeting begins with milk and donuts supplied by the Superintendent.

CLASSIFIED ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The importance of good communication with the classified staff cannot be underemphasized. We are striving to keep this group aware of the activities

CLASSIFIED ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CONTINUED)

and plans for the district. We meet with representatives of the classified staff four - five times per year.

Since the group represented by the classified staff is so diverse we have formed a second committee consisting of a member from each classification so that we can study in-depth some of the concerns arising from the larger meeting.

WELCOME-APPRECIATION-RECOGNITION DINNER

How to properly say "thanks" to those staff members who have recently retired, those who have just become a part of the staff and those who have devoted many years to the district has been a concern of ours for some time.

To do all of that and more we have developed a "carry-in" dinner concept. In mid-September we invite all of our employees and their spouses to the dinner. Our invited guests are the recent retirees and the new employees, both certified and classified.

The carry-in dinner concept is popular and it is followed with a short program that recognizes those groups. We also award the "Teacher of the Year" and "Classified Employee of the Year" plaques at that event, as well as the "Friends of the Schools" award.

All retired employees are invited to be with us and they have been quite responsive. The activity continues to grow in interest and is a regular part of our communications program.

HAVE A CUP OF COFFEE ON ME

During the course of any school year many people do things to make your job easier and these efforts need to be recognized.

To express my thanks for this help, a card has been developed that says, "Thanks for the favor --- have a cup of coffee on me". Attached to this card is a small packet of instant coffee. We then forward it to the person who did something special. It is a unique way of saying "thank you".

BOARD OF EDUCATION NOON VISITATIONS

The board of education members enjoy visiting the schools in the district and conversing with the staff and students. The principals are also interested in "showing off" their product and are willing hosts for such events.

Each month the board of education members visit a different instructional building in the district, usually at noon. To comply with the state Sunshine Law, we notify the media of the meeting and they in turn feel free to attend. The Superintendent and the Central Office staff do not attend the building visitation, thus giving the host principal, the staff and the students every opportunity to share concerns with the governing body. This effort has been well received by all concerned.

THE "SUP" IS OUR SUB

Unfortunately today's demands of the position do not allow adequate time for contact with our products - the students.

So that this writer can have some contact with students, on occasion it is possible to substitute for a teacher on a half-day basis. These occasions have been satisfying and surprisingly well received

by other classroom teachers in the building.

IF I WERE BOSS

Getting into the classroom and working with teachers and students is crucial to today's busy administrator.

This activity calls for the Superintendent to teach writing to a class of fifth grade students on a regular basis.

Each writing exercise asks the boys and girls to develop a paragraph or two based on a theme developed with the classroom teacher.

At the conclusion of the classroom writing exercise the papers are collected by the Superintendent, taken home, graded and returned to the students. It has been an excellent communication device and one that the students have enthusiastically endorsed.

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS

By far the least understood governmental body in any community is the board of education, yet it represents the most important aspect of a community and is usually one of its largest "industries".

We feel that we must foster more participation in board of education meetings in hopes of increasing the understanding of this governing body. We have made some efforts in this area.

Each board of education meeting begins with a pledge to the flag. A scout is invited to lead us in this activity. The scout receives a thank-you letter and a coupon for a complimentary sandwich from a local restaurant.

We try to invite groups to the board of education meeting on regular occasions. In September we have as our special invited guests the new employees. We have adult organization officers, special student groups, etc., as regularly as possible. Nearly every month we have an educational presentation on the agenda and these are of interest to all and does offer an in-depth explanation of instructional aspects of our operation.

We have an interesting program to foster participation. On a regular basis five or six students from an elementary school and their parents are invited to be our guests. They receive an invitation from the Superintendent to join us an hour before the regular meeting for an orientation session. The orientation session is shared by the President of the board of education and the respective building principal and we discuss the role of the board of education, how they are elected, the agenda, etc., and then finish with a tour of the building and a demonstration on the computer in the office of the Treasurer. During the orientation session the students sit in the chairs normally occupied by a board member. We take their picture for them to keep and then forward to them a thank-you note and a coupon for a sandwich. The parents also receive

a thank-you note. This effort has been popular and appreciative.

At each board of education meeting we have what we refer to as the "Happy Corner". Prior to the official business we highlight some aspect of our curriculum by using staff members and/or students to tell the board of education and the audience about something "positive" in the schools. We alternate elementary and secondary topics for the "Happy Corner" and have found it to be both interesting and informative.

The board of education meeting is designed with the citizen in mind. Each visitor receives the exact information as that held by board of education members. The citizens are invited to participate in the deliberations and this creates a very friendly and informal atmosphere. There is a special place within the agenda for a hearing of the public.

We are very sensitive to personnel items acted upon at a board of education. If an employee is hired, resigns or is promoted he/she receives a letter from the Superintendent soon after the meeting. We have found this personal touch to be very much appreciated by all employees.

After each meeting we finalize two publications. BOARD BULLETIN is a summary of the action items of the meeting that is forwarded to the staff. UP-DATE is a publication forwarded to the business patrons of the community via our bulk-rate permit. Hopefully this finds its way into waiting rooms, etc., for more readership and understanding.

By nature board of education meetings are not noted for their entertainment value, but with some imagination they can be informative and interesting to the public and we feel we have an obligation to try and involve the citizenry in the deliberations of this august body.

APPLE FROM THE TEACHER

We have used a spin-off from the "Apple for the Teacher" idea to recognize in some way positive action of our students. We felt that it was important to develop a project that would get teachers to identify personally with students who do something that would be positive in nature. In addition to the personal involvement of the teachers, it obviously was important for students to know that their positive actions, however small, were being recognized and rewarded.

From this rationale we began our "Apple from the Teacher" project. We developed an apple coupon that is given to a student who has displayed some positive behavior. The coupon includes the name of the student, the teacher and the building.

The student is encouraged to take the coupon to the local Kroger store, they in turn give the student a red apple.

The Kroger personnel collect all of the redeemed coupons and each month a coupon is drawn and that student is named our "Apple of the Month" winner. The student, the nominating teacher and the building principal are scheduled to visit the Kroger store and a picture is taken and put on the supermarket bulletin board.

The monthly winner is also given a ceramic apple. If the winner is a girl, we put a flower from our high school greenhouse in the apple. If it is a boy is our winner we fill the ceramic apple with candy.

At the conclusion of the school year, the committee will all of the redeemed coupons and select one student who will get a special award and be known as our "Student of the Year" winner.

We also hope to publish the names of all of the students who received a coupon and that group will be referred to as our "Apple Corps".

APPLE FROM THE TEACHER (CONTINUED)

We have been extremely pleased with the project and several buildings have used the concept as a foundation for recognizing student behavior and achievement. The continued involvement of the Kroger Company has also been good for the district and they have noted that their organization is proud of their participation.